

Carl Purcell – paint

I served as an interrogator for the Air Force in Vietnam, but that was only one year snatched out of a series of years. When I returned, I re-connected the threads of the year before Vietnam with the present and continued where I had left off.

What did influence me from my Vietnam experience was the attitude about life I encountered in my interrogations. While gathering the information desired by the Air Force I also attempted to learn how these North Vietnamese soldiers viewed life. Most were fatalistic, accepting whatever entered their lives as the dictation of fate. This was so contrary to my own views of self-determination that at first I was perplexed. Perhaps that is part of the reason that year did not become a defining moment in my life.

While in Vietnam, I kept up my art mainly by illustrating the envelopes for my daily letters to my wife. Other than a few paintings done from sketches of the houseboats and the streets of Saigon I never revisited that year. I was more concerned with the present, with my studies and with my family. Nothing in the past would teach me what I needed to know.

The two greatest forces that have motivated my art are those that came from my parents. From my father I inherited a love of geology and the study of rocks. He loved geology and I grew up loving to tramp the rock canyons near my home in Arizona. He also came from a large farm family in Missouri. My mother was of Utah farming stock, and while I never had a desire to farm, I was always drawn to rural subjects. Somehow, in my soul those two streams merged with a musical river whose headwaters are a mystery to me. I always loved to sing and music has remained a deep love of mine. The music merged with the other influences to inform most of what I do. I even married a musician and she has inspired me more than anyone has.

I see the Utah barns and sheds as the detritus of past dreams, the song that is left after those whose lives etched their cadence in the earth are gone. The old, oft-repaired fences leaning in undulating dances present a rhythm I feel and hear. I respond to the rhythm in the waving grasses, the sunbaked boards and discarded buckets and barrels, the rusting bones of old machinery and tractors. To me, an old farm is a veritable orchestral arrangement of shapes and lines.

The interest in geology bequeathed to me by my father is the other theme I find myself returning to periodically. I am drawn to rocks, rock canyons and road cuts that reveal the layers of geologic strata. I see in the pattern of cracks and the layering arrangement of shapes a rhythmic notation, like a conductor's score. I just transcribe it into a painted variation. Many of the paintings so inspired bear musical names like "Stone Cadence", "Rocky Rhapsody" or "Appassionata." Thus, the twin themes of my life are borne along by a musical tide that for me is the core of my art.